ROM

volume 56:number 3
2025 spring

Spring 2025

The Art of Won Lee
Expressionism and materiality in sculpture and public art

Wildlife Photographer of the Year
Powerful shots of our planet's biodiversity and all that is at stake

Imagine Dragons
How a new Komodo dragon came to the Museum's collections

AUSCHWITZ.

Not long ago. Not far away.

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ROM is home to a world-class collection of artworks, cultural objects, and natural history specimens. Not all of our 18 million objects and specimens are on display, though many are featured in our 40 gallery and exhibition spaces. As you plan your visit, please note that not everything within these pages will be on view in the galleries.

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GUIDED BY PURPOSE

Fieldwork on remote rivers in the Amazon. ROM-original exhibitions that travel the globe. Digital programs on Indigenous ways of knowing.

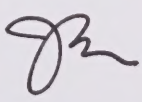
The work of the Museum is expansive. Yet everything we undertake is guided by a single purpose, first articulated in our 2018 Strategic Direction: "helping people to understand the past, make sense of the present, and come together to shape a shared future." And that purpose comes alive in the pages of this issue of ROM magazine—and this moment for the Museum.

In the cover story on *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.*, we learn how the exhibition's thoughtful approach and design help visitors grasp the terrifying magnitude of the largest mass murder site in human history, as well as the systems, people, and beliefs that made such a place possible. While rooted in history, *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away*. also speaks to the importance—then and now—of core values such as compassion, understanding, empathy, and inclusion, and of what can happen when those values are discarded.

Returning visitor favourite, *Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2024*, is also on now and featured in this issue. The exhibition captures animals at their most vulnerable—and a planet in crisis. In one dreamlike photograph, a leopard seal beneath the ice looks directly into the camera lens. In another, dozens of acres of garbage bloom like a tumour across a verdant green wetland. Combined, the exhibition's images help us understand the world today, challenging us to see it as it is and imagine how it could be.

While plainly apparent in our exhibitions, the Museum's purpose also guides our research, including that of Dr. Kim Tait, ROM's Teck Endowed Chair of Mineralogy. In February, Dr. Tait made the news for her work on the samples NASA obtained from the asteroid Bennu, which could contain clues to the origins of life on Earth.

"There are going to be many new discoveries," Dr. Tait explains later in the magazine. "Not just for me, but for future generations as well."



Josh Basseches
ROM Director and CEO

Getty / Rahul © Royal Ontario Museum, 2022.

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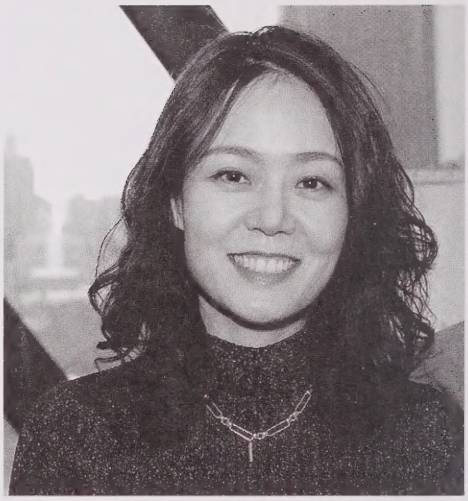
A graduate of Columbia University, Colin Fleming collaborates with experts across the Museum to write everything from magazine articles to ad copy.

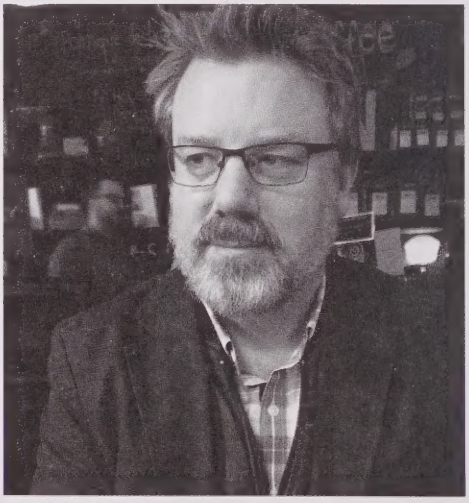


Vicki Sung-yeon Kwon
Associate Curator of Korean Art & Culture

Vicki Kwon is an art historian of modern and contemporary art with a focus on Korean art and visual culture. She has curated and coordinated transdisciplinary exhibitions in Canada, Norway, South Korea, and Switzerland and has taught art history and visual culture studies at the University of Alberta since 2017.

Amy Lathrop
Collection Specialist, Natural History

Amy Lathrop is dedicated to raising public awareness of ROM's Reptiles and Amphibians collection. Her deep passion for amphibians, paired with the Museum's unique fieldwork opportunities, has led to the discovery of several new species. She has also collaborated on research projects focused on the phylogeography of reptiles and amphibians from Southeast Asia, China, and Guyana.



David McKay
Senior Publicist

David McKay shares news of ROM exhibitions and of groundbreaking research with journalists. If you have read in the news about the Burgess Shale or dino cancer or even seen Rick Mercer running along Bloor Street in a Viking outfit, then you know David's work.

Member Benefits
Dispatches
Research
From the Collections
Coming Soon

PART 1

EXCLUSIVE MEMBER PREVIEWS

Members see it first and for free. Join us at the upcoming Member-exclusive exhibition preview.

Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools: 300 Years of Flemish Masterworks

Friday, June 27, 2025, 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Saturday, June 28, 2025, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools features rarely seen artworks by artists from the Flemish Golden Era, including Rubens and van Dyck. The exhibition transports us to Flanders, the Flemish region of Belgium, and showcases the monumental art created from the 15th to 18th centuries that continues to shape our world today.

Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools: 300 Years of Flemish Masterworks is co-organized by the Denver Art Museum and the Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp (Belgium). The exhibition is curated by Katharina Van Cauteren, Executive Director of the Phoebus Foundation, and ROM's presentation is curated by Chloé M. Pelletier, Curator of European Art (before 1800) at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

ROM special exhibitions are generously supported by the Royal Exhibitions Circle.

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Members save 25% on birthday party activities for children (ages 6–14). Make your child's birthday one to remember by celebrating at ROM, where excitement awaits around every corner!

Discount Member Weekend

Toronto Zoo
2000 Meadowvale Road,
Toronto, ON
Saturday, April 12, 2025
Sunday, April 13, 2025

Save 20% off regular admission at the Toronto Zoo.

Use the code ROMMEMBER when purchasing tickets online at torontozoo.com. Please present your ROM membership upon arrival at the zoo along with your discounted tickets.

Member Weekends

Free Exchange Weekends

McMichael Canadian Art Collection
10365 Islington Avenue,
Kleinburg, ON
Saturday, May 3, 2025
Sunday, May 4, 2025

THEMUSEUM
10 King St W,
Kitchener, ON
Saturday, June 21, 2025
Sunday, June 22, 2025

Member Evening

Enjoy a special night at the Museum with fellow Members, and chat with ROM experts about their work.

Mark your calendars—the next Member Evening is July 3, 2025.

Tours

Exclusive Tours for Members

Members have special access to unique guided tours throughout the year. Join us for these newly launched tours, and explore the collections through a different lens.

Welcome Tours
This 45-minute Highlights tour brings our most iconic objects to life. You'll gain insight into some of the standout pieces of art, culture, and nature—throughout the world and throughout time.

Coming Soon
Family Tours: Art Explorers
Get ready for an exciting adventure through the world of art. On this fun-filled tour, you'll travel across time and cultures, discovering incredible objects along the way. Members will get to touch real specimens and even show off their own amazing artistic skills. Upcoming dates for this tour will be announced soon by email.

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As a ROM Member, you support everything from acquisitions and field research to increased accessibility and new, more immersive exhibitions. Thanks for belonging—and believing in what we do.

You make ROM better.

Member Evening and Exclusive Tours for Members photos by Roger Yip.

THE RETURN OF ROM IMMORTAL

Reimagining our connections with nature

BACK IN 2022, the first ROM Immortal film—the centrepiece in a larger brand campaign—landed like a lightning bolt. The epic video, which *The Globe and Mail* described as a "dramatic six-minute march through history," netted accolades across the ad industry and tens of thousands of views online. And while the scope of the film is sweeping, its focus is firmly on art and culture.

The newest Immortal film, released late last year, focuses on another side of the Museum: natural history. Dubbed *ROM Immortal: Nature's Symphony*, the three-minute film stars a curious chimpanzee, who marvels at hurtling asteroids, massive fossils, and exploding volcanos.

"This campaign is our love letter to the natural world—a clarion call to protect Earth and everything in it," says Sally Tindal, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at ROM. "The Museum plays a vital role in our understanding of nature and the world around us, and we hope this campaign inspires people to revisit ROM with fresh eyes."

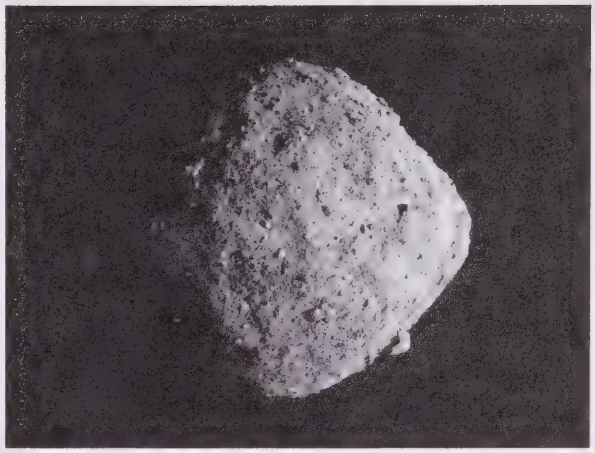
Craig McIntosh, the Chief Creative Officer at Broken Heart Love Affair (ROM's Agency of Record), who worked closely with the film's director, Rune Milton, says the "goal was to forge an emotional connection between viewers, the Museum, and the expansive realm of natural history."

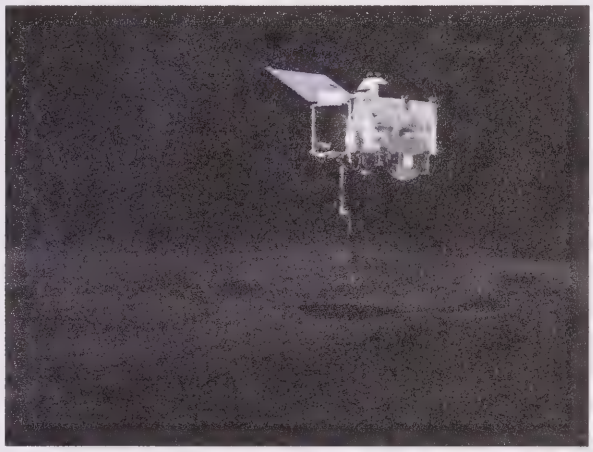
ROM Immortal: Nature's Symphony at ROM
Sure, YouTube is fine. But nothing beats that classic movie experience. And until August 31, 2025, you can watch this short film as intended—on the big screen at ROM, home to the stories and specimens that inspired it.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF LIFE

What can asteroid samples tell us about the formation of life on Earth?

By **Colin J. Fleming**





DR. KIM TAIT, the Senior Curator, Teck Endowed Chair of Mineralogy, tells me not to be scared. The asteroid Bennu *might* crash into Earth but not in our lifetimes. And one of the reasons NASA sent the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft to retrieve samples from Bennu, and not some other asteroid, is that better understanding of Bennu's makeup could help scientists of the future deflect the asteroid so it doesn't collide with Earth.

Even more importantly, the half-kilometre-wide, nearly 4.6-billion-year-old asteroid might offer clues to the formation of life on our planet. Many scientists theorize that, billions of years ago, a Bennu-like asteroid rich with carbon—the building block of life—struck Earth, making the emergence of life possible. Studying samples from Bennu is a way to test this theory.

Just a week before Dr. Tait sat down with me, the first two major papers on the Bennu samples—one in *Nature*, another in *Nature Astronomy*—were published. According to NASA, the asteroid's "rock and dust" contain "molecules that, on our planet, are key to life, as well as a history of saltwater that could have served as the 'broth' for these compounds to interact and combine."

Dr. Tait, who was a co-author on the paper in *Nature*, says the "salty water brine" was unexpected. "We find these types of conditions here on Earth, but it wasn't thought to have been in space," she says, adding that this is one of the reasons why having a pristine sample is so important. "If we had found those results from a meteorite that had fallen, we wouldn't have necessarily interpreted it that way."

Yet as Dr. Tait explained, these results, while exciting, are "just the absolute beginning." For proof, she points to the Apollo missions.

"We brought these rocks back in the '60s, and we're still making discoveries," she says. "It's not like we're just going to look at the Bennu samples once, put them in a drawer, and never look at them again. There are going to be many new discoveries, not only for myself, but for future generations."

Looking for more asteroids?
Visit ROM's Teck Suite of Galleries: Earth's Treasures, where you'll find the Tagish Lake meteorite—an ultra-rare, near-pristine sample collected in the Yukon 25 years ago. "It's not like anything we find on Earth," says Dr. Tait.

Colin J. Fleming is Senior Creative Communications Strategist at ROM.

Bottom photo courtesy NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

A DISCOVERY OF MONARCHS

How a ROM entomologist's research helped us understand the Monarch Butterfly's epic multi-generational migration

By **David McKay**

EVERY SUMMER IN TORONTO, Monarch Butterflies can be spotted fluttering about, but they do not reside here all year. Instead, they partake in a multi-generational journey north during the spring and summer and in the fall an epic migration south. We now know this because of a ROM entomologist's lifetime of work.

Fifty years ago this January, Fred and Norah Urquhart got a call from Catalina and Ken Brugger in Mexico, who were on the trail of migrating Monarch Butterflies. This call would definitively answer the riddle of where Monarchs went in the winter and was revealed

to the public in the cover story of *National Geographic*'s August 1976 edition, written by Fred Urquhart. In it, he describes that phone call: "'We have located the colony!' he said, unable to control the excitement in his voice. 'We have found them—millions of Monarchs—in evergreens beside a mountain clearing.'"

Such was how the news of the Monarchs' epic migration—from their most northerly summer grounds, ranging from the Prairies to the Maritimes to as far north as the milkweed will allow, to the overwintering grounds of central Mexico—was shared with the world.

Long revered in central Mexico and representing the returning souls of ancestors for Dia de los Muertos each November, Monarch Butterflies are one of nature's marvels. What wasn't known to the locals was that the Monarchs, which hung by the hundreds of thousands in oyamel fir trees, could have included the same ones that fluttered around Fred's childhood hometown of Toronto.

For unlike some other butterfly species, whose laid eggs survive the harsh Ontario winters, the eggs of Monarch butterflies were never to be found. So where Monarchs went and how they arrived back each year were questions that fascinated Fred. As a master's student at the University of Toronto, he started working at ROM (then operated as part of the university) looking after the entomology collections. For over twenty years, Fred studied Monarchs and refined the delicate tagging techniques to enable their movements to be traced; though not employed at ROM, Norah was Fred's lifelong partner in both marriage and lepidopterology endeavours. Weighing less than a gram, butterflies were too delicate for typical animal trackers. The solution was a small sticker with simple instructions printed in tiny letters affixed to the butterfly wing, asking people who came across such a tagged Monarch to return it to the University of Toronto.

Over the decades, a picture of the Monarchs' long autumnal trip south and generational waves of their return journey north began to slowly emerge. With the help of volunteers—"community scientists" in today's terminology—butterflies were tagged and sent back to Fred in Toronto. He shared some of the findings in publications such as *Report on the Studies of the Movements of the Monarch Butterfly in North America* (1955) and his book *The Monarch Butterfly* (1960), which tantalizingly sketched out the butterfly's movements across the continent. After having risen to the position of Director of Zoology and Palaeontology, he left ROM in 1961 and continued his research with the University of Toronto.

Tracking the Monarchs to their overwintering grounds was done by volunteers Ken and Catalina, who lived in Mexico and responded to a newspaper posting in 1972 from the Urquharts. Their multi-year tracking efforts led them to mountainous oyamel fir trees on January 2, 1975. There, among the trees laden with roughly 60 million semi-dormant butterflies, was the winter home of the Monarchs. The mountain forest areas are now protected by the government of Mexico as the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Though it may take only weeks for a Monarch to fly south, it took a lifetime of work for Fred and Norah to piece that flight path together. So next summer, when you see a Monarch Butterfly munching on milkweed or flitting about among some flowers, consider its momentous and perilous journey ahead.

Monarchs on display at ROM
Visitors can check out Monarchs at ROM in *Nature in Brilliant Colour*, where nine are on display to illustrate the biomimicry that this species and non-poisonous Viceroy Butterflies share. In this year's *Wildlife Photographer of the Year*, photojournalist Jamie Rojo's photo essay shares his images from the overwintering areas of Mexico. And keen observers in the Life in Crisis: Schad Gallery of Biodiversity may look up to find Monarchs flying among the birds.

David McKay is a Senior Publicist at ROM.

HERE BE DRAGONS

How the Toronto Zoo's beloved Komodo dragon came to ROM

By Amy Lathrop

IN FEBRUARY 2024, ROM received an email from the Toronto Zoo. The zoo had just euthanized their 20-year-old, captive-raised Komodo dragon and asked whether the Museum was interested in adding this specimen to their collections. Correspondence like this evokes mixed emotions. The Toronto Zoo had just lost one of their icons, Kilat, from the Australasia Pavilion, but ROM was presented with an opportunity to make the most of this loss.

At two-and-a-half to three metres long, Komodo dragons are the largest extant (living) lizard in the world. There are fewer than 100 specimens of Komodo dragons in museum collections, and because of their size, most adult specimens have been prepared as skeletons. Prior to the acquisition of Kilat, ROM had two complete skeletons. One of these is stored in the extant skeletal collection of Vertebrate Palaeontology, and the other, fully articulated, is on display in ROM's Life in Crisis: Schad Gallery of Biodiversity. Adding Kilat, who is 2.4 metres long, to the Museum's collection as a preserved specimen will provide access to soft anatomical features that are absent in fossil remains.

There are fewer than 100 Komodo dragons in museums, and most of them have been prepared as skeletons. Adding Kilat to the collection as a preserved specimen provides research access to the soft anatomy of the largest lizard in the world.

Komodo dragons belong to the order Squamata, which includes lizards and snakes. The order diverged from the ancestors of modern birds and reptiles millions of years ago. Komodo dragons are part of the broader group of reptiles that coexisted with dinosaurs. By studying the behaviour, physiology, and anatomy of Komodo dragons, researchers have used these animals to draw inferences on how some dinosaurs may have lived, moved, and evolved.

Varanid lizards like Komodo dragons have a unique cardiovascular and metabolic system that shares similarities with that of mammals. Their hearts have a partially divided ventricle, allowing for separate pulmonary and systemic circulations, enabling them to sustain high metabolic rates and endurance, facilitating intense physical activity, such as hunting and territorial disputes, compared with other lizards.

Komodo dragons exemplify this adaptation. They can grow to impressive sizes and run at considerable speeds (up to 20 kilometres per hour), allowing them to hunt large prey. Their elevated metabolism, powerful sense of smell, sharp teeth and claws, and toxic saliva contribute to hunting prowess. Komodo dragons also engage in aggressive territorial and mating behaviours, often resulting in physical confrontations and scarring.

With its imposing size, scaly skin, and domineering nature, the Komodo dragon served as a basis for Godzilla's reptilian features. When creating Godzilla for the 1954 Japanese film *Gojira* (the original name for Godzilla), the filmmakers also drew on various other sources, including dinosaurs (particularly theropods) and various prehistoric lizards, combined with the film's concept of a giant, destructive creature awakened by nuclear testing.

In reality, Komodo dragons exist in the wild in only eight volcanic island locations in the Indonesian archipelago. Today's wild populations are confined to 800 square kilometres of habitat that has sufficient resources to sustain this apex predator—a mere speck of its prehistoric distribution 50,000 years ago. Fossil records suggest that two lineages of large-bodied varanids evolved four million years ago during the Pliocene Epoch: one on mainland Asia and another on the island-continent of Australia and that included *Varanus komodoensis* (the

Kilat inside the Toronto Zoo's Australasia Pavilion. He was the first Komodo dragon hatched in Canada.

Komodo dragon) and the even larger *Varanus prisca*. Not long after modern humans arrived, both species disappeared from Australia; *V. prisca* went extinct, and surviving populations of *V. komodoensis* were found only in the westernmost part of their range.

In 2019, the International Union for Conservation of Nature assessed the Komodo as "endangered," a term reserved for species that are facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild. In 2021, the estimated number of Komodo dragons living in the wild was under 3,500, according to ecologist T.S. Jessop, with only 400 of those being adult females. Estimates are that suitable habitat for the Komodo will be cut by 30 percent in the next 45 years due to rising sea levels, which will potentially isolate the dragons and lead to population loss.

Komodo National Park, located in the Indonesian archipelago and established in 1980, has played a crucial role in protecting the species. Strict laws have been enacted to reduce poaching, and ecotourism has been promoted to raise awareness and fund conservation activities. Over 50 zoological institutions are involved in a cooperative breeding program that carefully monitors the genetic diversity of captive populations.

In life, Kilat contributed to research on the dental structure and the development and replacement of teeth in predatory reptiles. Kilat's teeth are similar to what is found in theropod dinosaurs.

Amy Lathrop is Collections Technician of reptiles and amphibians at ROM.

SAINTS, SINNERS, LOVERS, AND FOOLS

300 Years of Flemish Masterworks

THIS SUMMER, ROM visitors will be immersed in the abundant creativity of the Flemish Golden Age as *Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools: 300 Years of Flemish Masterworks* brings to life the vibrancy of the southern Netherlands.

Featuring a visual feast of 80 stunning medieval, Renaissance, and baroque artworks and objects, the exhibition launches on June 28, 2025, and offers a whirlwind tour of Flanders from 1400 to 1700. Visitors will have the opportunity to see rarely exhibited pieces, including paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Hans Memling, Jan Gossaert, Jan Brueghel, Clara Peeters, Jacob Jordaens, Frans Francken, and Michaelina Wautier, among many others.

The cosmopolitan cities of the southern Netherlands serve as the starting point for the exhibition, as visitors are situated within the geography of this dynamic region, then home to Europe's intellectual and business elite. Throughout the early modern period, cities such as Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp were major hubs for trade and commerce, with tremendous cultural capital as well as artistic influence.

The widespread impact that this region has had on visual culture is explored through the stylistic inventions that artists used to tell stories, introducing new ways of painting religious scenes, as well as alternate modes including the invention of portraiture, alongside genre scenes of everyday life that broke new aesthetic ground.

Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools underscores how the region's dynamic artistic approaches would come to define our understanding of images for centuries to come—and continue to impact contemporary visual culture.

Circle of Dirk Bouts
Virgin and Child in an Enclosed Garden
1468
Oil on panel

Saints, Sinners, Lovers, and Fools: 300 Years of Flemish Masterworks is co-organized by the Denver Art Museum and the Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp (Belgium). The exhibition is curated by Katharina Van Cauteren, Executive Director of the Phoebus Foundation, and ROM's presentation is curated by Chloé M. Pelletier, Curator of European Art (before 1800) at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

This exhibition is generously supported by the Royal Exhibitions Circle.

Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.

The Art of Won Lee

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

PART 2

ROM's monumental new exhibition grapples with the enormity of the Holocaust

MAKING SENSE OF

AUSCHWITZ

By **Colin J. Fleming**

Photo by Huw Jones.

ALL DAY AND NIGHT, trains rumbled into Auschwitz, bringing thousands of Jews, Poles, Roma, and others packed into crowded and filthy freight cars. Upon arrival, the prisoners, carrying what little they had, spilled out onto the platform—a maelstrom of terrified families, snarling dogs, and uniformed SS officers.

"They did not know it, but the new arrivals were about to face selection," writes Jonathan Freedland in *The Escape Artist: The Man Who Broke out of Auschwitz to Warn the World*. "If they were sent to the right, they would be marched off first, registered as prisoners and given the chance to work and therefore to live, if only for a while. If they were directed left, their imminent destiny was death."

Of those condemned to die, very few could grasp what awaited them. This was largely by design, part of the Nazis' larger plan to placate the very people whom they were trying to murder—all in the service of secrecy and efficiency.

Even as prisoners were herded into the gas chambers, a sign assured them they were in the "Baths." And in the moments before Zyklon B cannisters dropped into the chamber, filling the room with poison, those same prisoners could look up and see fake showerheads.

The other reason so many arrivals failed to grasp what awaited them was that the very existence of Auschwitz—the largest documented

A woman's dress shoe belonging to an unknown deportee to Auschwitz (1940s). Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Opposite: Uniform worn by Marian Kostuch, held as a Polish political prisoner (1940–44). Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

The very existence of Auschwitz—the largest documented mass murder site in human history— was almost impossible to fathom.

mass murder site in human history—was almost impossible to fathom.

"It was completely unprecedented," says Dr. Robert Jan van Pelt, a professor at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, renowned Holocaust scholar, and lead curator for *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* "Prisoner camps had certainly existed since the late 19th century, when it became possible to produce cheap barbed wire and prefabricated barracks on an industrial scale. But the idea that you would have places where massive amounts of people would be brought without any judicial process and then put into situations of total starvation, abuse, and slave labour—this had never happened before in history."

While the scale of the camp was certainly unprecedented, historians studying Auschwitz today have access not just to victims' testimonies but to mountains of archival evidence from the Nazis themselves. "In 1945, because of the defeat of Nazi Germany, because of the bombings, all of the evidence could be found if not literally on the street, then at least metaphorically," says van Pelt. "And the Americans went into the now forcefully opened archives of the German state to collect the evidence to be used in the Nuremberg trials."

Yet even with the wealth of archival evidence and survivors' testimonies, the enormity of the Holocaust remains difficult to comprehend—a fact that "plays into the hands of deniers," van Pelt says.

So given how hard it is to understand, how do you teach people about Auschwitz and the Holocaust? For van Pelt, the answer is in the sprawling exhibition he helped create: *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.*

Now on at ROM, the internationally touring exhibition created by Musealia, co-produced by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland, and developed with an esteemed international panel of curators and historians is one of the most comprehensive exhibitions ever presented on the subject. Survivor testimonials, historical documents, and first-hand accounts by emancipating forces create a powerful connection to the exhibition's more than 500 original objects—many of which have never been seen before in Canada—on loan from the Auschwitz Memorial and more than 20 other major institutions and private collections around the world.

While the volume of material seems overwhelming, the presentation of it is remarkably restrained. Luis Ferreiro, the Director and CEO of Musealia, who first conceived of the exhibition, wanted to "present facts and artifacts almost forensically." His inspiration, both for this approach and the exhibition, was *Man's Search for Meaning*, a Holocaust memoir in which the author, psychiatrist Victor Frankl, articulates his theory that the pursuit of meaning is the foundation of mental well-being.

"[Frankl] doesn't make you feel this or that or push you to cry," Ferreiro says. "It's just somebody touching you gently, not shaking you, not forcing you, because, in the end, change is something only each one of us can make in ourselves."

This restraint and almost forensic approach to the material is woven throughout the exhibition. In fact, it's apparent in the very first artifact we see: a single red women's dress shoe.

Ever since the Soviet Red Army discovered mounds of shoes while liberating the first concentration camps, shoes have become a potent symbol of the Holocaust. For as van Pelt notes, unlike clothing, "The shoe continues to carry the imprint of the body" and the "presence of the other." This red dress shoe is particularly affecting because it suggests that its owner imagined a life *beyond* Auschwitz—a life of pleasure and parties and dancing.

Throughout the exhibition, many other such personal objects—victims' hairbrushes, buttons, and eyeglasses—hint at the scale of devastation. "Ultimately, the Holocaust's most shattering impact is at the intimate level," says van Pelt.

Above Left:
Child's shoe with sock. Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Above Right and Middle:
Prisoner-made chess set with storage box made out of a sardine tin, engraved with "Auschwitz 1943." Collection of Miroslav Ganobis.

Bottom Left:
A heap of cutlery (alloy) that fused together after the SS set fire to Kanada, the storage sheds in which prisoners' belongings were sorted. Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Bottom Right:
Tin of condensed milk (1945). (After the SS left Auschwitz, prisoners broke into a warehouse and found food, including tins of condensed milk, which they shared with all.) Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

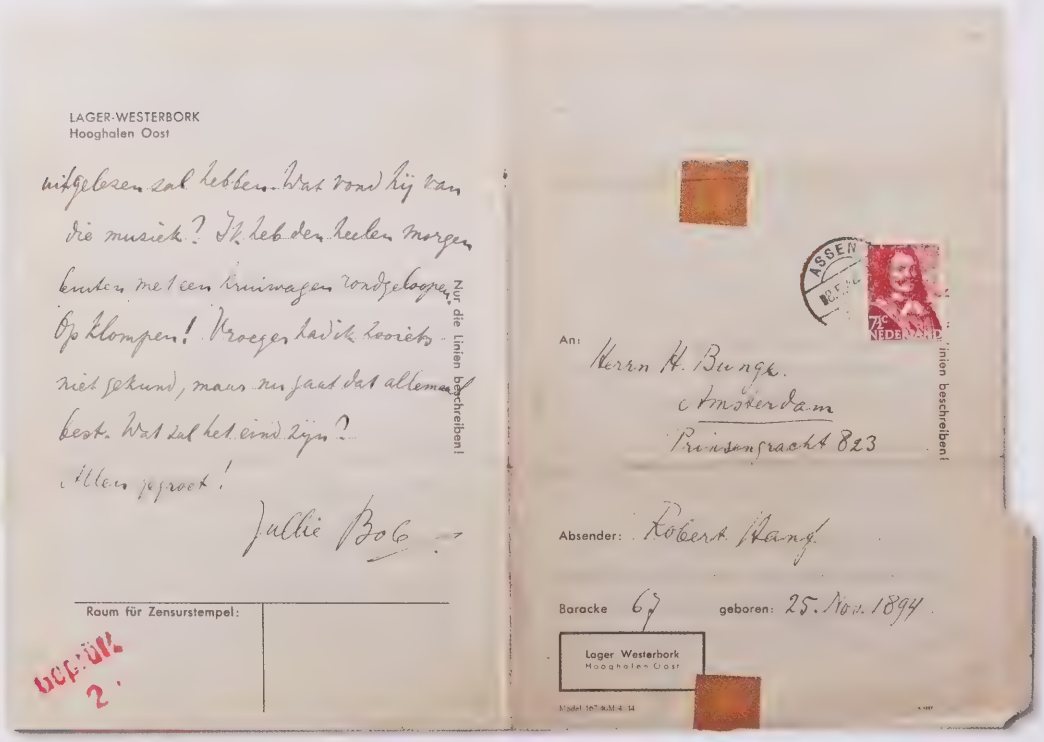
Throughout the exhibition, many other such personal objects—victims' hairbrushes, buttons, and eyeglasses—hint at the scale of devastation. "Ultimately, the Holocaust's most shattering impact is at the intimate level," says van Pelt.

Above:
Decorative box made by Bronislaw Czech in Auschwitz (1941–44). Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Middle Left:
Glasses brought into the Auschwitz camp by a deportee (1940s). Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Middle Right:
Rings of Leib Krycberg and Miriam Litman, before 1945, engraved with their prisoner numbers. Collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial (left) and the Museum Collection of Yad Vashem (right).

Bottom:
Final letter written by Bob Hanf (one of two), 1944. Collection of Robert Jan van Pelt.



Colour image of Medallic Glasses, rings, and decorative box photos by Paul Litman. Images used with permission.

But as often as the exhibition zooms in, it zooms out, providing essential context about World War I, the Weimar Republic, the history of anti-Semitism, and the rise of Nazism. For Ferreiro, these sections of the exhibition also provide answers to some of the most fundamental questions about the Holocaust. "How was it possible for one of the most technologically and scientifically advanced societies of its time to turn to genocide?" asks Ferreiro. "How was it possible for neighbours to betray their neighbours and to become silently complicit in such a genocide?"

Josh Basseches, ROM Director and CEO, adds that the exhibition's many objects, "combined with the searing testimony of survivors, speak not just to the horrors of the Holocaust, but to the systems, people, and beliefs that allowed it to happen." Basseches continues, "While Auschwitz asks us to bear witness, it also invites us to come together—and imagine a different future. That's central to the work of a great museum like ROM."

The exhibition is also clear eyed about the dizzying scale of the crimes. "1.3 million people were deported to Auschwitz," writes van Pelt in the *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* catalogue. "Of these, more than 1.1 million perished in that camp: 1 million Jews, from Hungary, Poland, France, and a dozen other European countries; seventy-five thousand non-Jewish Poles; twenty-one thousand Roma; fifteen thousand Soviet prisoners of war; and up to fifteen thousand people who fall into other categories."

Even when the exhibition zooms out, it never loses sight of Auschwitz as a physical reality, which for van Pelt, a professor of architecture,

"While Auschwitz asks us to bear witness, it also invites us to come together—and imagine a different future. That's central to the work of a great museum like ROM."

—Josh Basseches

Opposite:
Jews from Lubny, Ukraine, shortly before their murder by an Einsatzgruppe paramilitary death squad, 1941.
Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg.

was essential. "One of the things that we try to do in this exhibition, right at the very beginning, is to give the visitor a clear sense of the place—and repeat," he says. "We talk about the town. We talk about the region. We locate the town before the camps were created."

By "continuously reinforcing" the geography of Auschwitz, van Pelt says visitors can better visualize the architecture of the camps in their minds, allowing them "to understand this very chaotic reality."

Then once that geography and broader history has been established, the exhibition takes visitors deep inside the concentration camps. Here, large artifacts, like a concrete post and a section of a wooden barracks, reinforce that sense of place, while smaller ones, like a pair of black SS jackboots placed at a child's eye level, give a sense of the victims and their perpetrators.

Although many of the artifacts are what the audience might expect, others are introduced precisely to throw visitors off balance.

One such artifact is a hulking rusted metal street sign reading "Auschwitz Kreis Bielitz" (Auschwitz District Bielitz)—evidence, says van Pelt, that the city of Auschwitz was "a fully functioning municipality."

Another is the large wooden desk that belonged to the Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss, the focus of Jonathan Glazer's Oscar-winning 2023 film *Zone of Interest*. At first glance, the desk is unremarkable save for the eight artifacts—including a photograph of Adolf Hitler and another of the commandant's family—adorning its surface. But then, as Ferreiro says, Höss's "upside-down" world comes into focus.

At this very desk, a man sat down, organized his papers, and committed himself to the task of finding a better, more efficient way to extinguish an entire people.

Colin J. Fleming is Senior Creative Communications Strategist at ROM.

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Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away. is also generously supported by the Royal Exhibitions Circle.

THE ART OF WON LEE

An exploration of expressionism and materiality through public art

By **Vicki Kwon**

WON LEE (b. Korea, 1946; d. Toronto, 2021; Korean name Won-Hyung Lee) was a celebrated Korean Canadian artist whose influence on the study of public art was as sizeable as his towering sculptures seen in public arenas around the world. Having contracted polio at the age of six, Lee lived with a curved spine for most of his life. His reflections on the human body are evident in the distinctive sculptures he crafted from bronze and clay. Drawing inspiration from the works of Alberto Giacometti and combining abstract and figurative elements, Lee's sculptures are characterized by elongated human figures with small heads, large chests and buttocks, and empty abdomens. Most of his sculptures feature more than one figure, emphasizing themes of togetherness.

Lee's trajectory as an artist was unique. Initially, he studied English at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea, before moving to the U.S. to earn his BFA at Pepperdine University. Struggling to make ends meet as a full-time artist, Lee later completed a business degree at the University of British Columbia and worked as an accountant. At the age of 56, in 2002, he pursued his true passion and enrolled in an MFA program at Johnson State College. This was where his career as a sculptor flourished, and he gained widespread recognition from that time until his death in 2021.

Lee is known for his large-scale sculptures seen in public parks and in front of the facades of commercial and government buildings across the U.S., South Korea, Vietnam, Mexico, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. His work was also featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions at galleries in Canada, China, South Korea, Mexico, and other countries. In honour of her late husband, Lee's wife, Mrs. Hyon Chu Lee, recently donated $100,000 to refresh the Museum's Gallery of Korea and contributed three Won Lee sculptures to the collection (currently not on display). The three sculptures are astute reflections of Lee's thoughts on corporeality, the world's exploitation of human and natural resources, and our human condition.

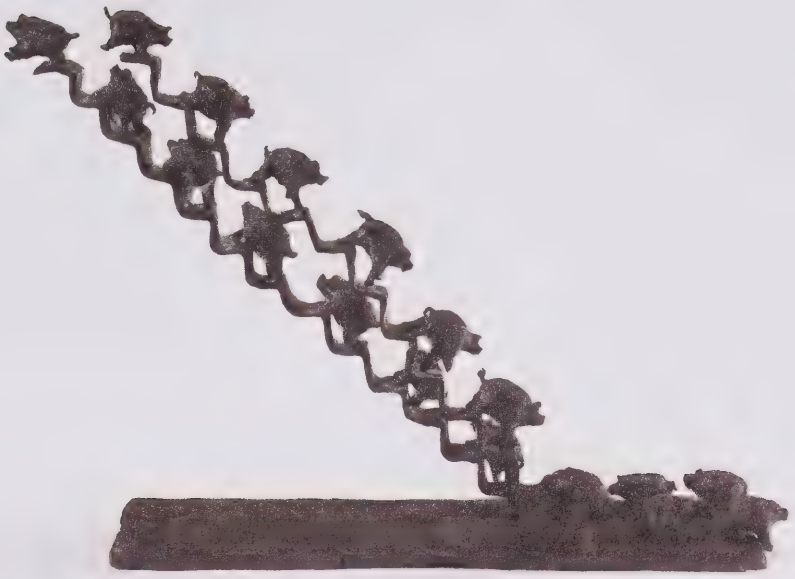
One of the pieces, *Who's There?* (2011), features three human figures standing topless but wearing jeans and shoes. The sculpture was cast after Lee's visit to a Levi's factory in Costa Rica. While conversing with young workers, Lee learned that they were paid just $1 per hour to make jeans, while it took them more than three months of wages to save enough to buy a pair of the very same Levi's jeans they worked on daily. Stunned by this conversation, Lee created the piece, which depicts one female, one male, and one cross-gender figure. Lee also created red jeans out of papier mâché and staged a performance in which he burned the jeans at his winter home in Mexico, surrounded by friends. The sculpture and performance bring into focus global wealth disparity, the exploitation of child labour in the global fashion industry, and our daily complicity as consumers.

Photo by Paul Fetko © BOM 2024.581

Won Lee
Who's There?
2011
Bronze sculpture
44 × 40 × 47 cm
Gift of Mrs Hyon Chu Lee in memory of Won Lee

Page 24:
Won Lee
Detail, *Herd #1*
2011
Bronze sculpture
52 × 15.5 × 54 cm
Gift of Mrs Hyon Chu Lee in memory of Won Lee

Photo by Paul Eekhoff. ROM 2024.58.3.



Won Lee
Herd #1
2011
Bronze sculpture
52 × 15.5 × 54 cm
Gift of Mrs Hyon Chu Lee in memory of Won Lee

Opposite:
Won Lee
Detail, *Meditators #2*
2006
Bronze sculpture
62 × 44 × 16 cm
Gift of Mrs Hyon Chu Lee in memory of Won Lee

Pigs running up and down stairs evoke the repetitive nature of daily routines, and the futility of human desire. This witty sculpture conveys nuanced messages through its playful form. What are the pigs running away from? Or are they running toward something?

A group of pigs running up and down stairs in two rows in *Herd #1* (2011) evokes themes of life's learning curve, the repetitive nature of daily routines, and the futility of human desire. This witty sculpture conveys these nuanced messages through its playful form. What are the pigs running away from? Or are they running toward something? Lee's art invites viewers to take this analogy and apply it to their experiences and interactions.

The third sculpture donated by Mrs. Lee was inspired by a serendipitous encounter Won Lee had with young students in China. During a visit to a school for a project, the students were making loud noises. When Lee asked them to meditate, two girls immediately assumed meditative poses resembling that of the Buddha. Lee quickly sketched them and later created *Meditators #2* (2006). After creating this work, he cast a series of two large human figures (each over 250 cm tall) meditating together in different poses. One of this series is permanently installed at Vermont State University, U.S.

For Lee, meditating together was a key concept. His sculptures consistently feature two or more figures, never a single form. The figures in Lee's sculptures are not solitary. Instead, they remain in communion with each other, a position that reflects Lee's exploration of human engagement and connection.

Lee established the Won Lee Awards, which continue to aid emerging talents and artists in need. Mrs. Lee continues to carry on his legacy through philanthropic endeavours supporting artists with disabilities and emerging artists worldwide.

Vicki Kwon is Associate Curator of Korean Art and Culture at ROM.

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Wildlife Photographer of the Year is developed and produced by the Natural History Museum, London.
This exhibition is generously supported by the Royal Exhibitions Circle.

Photo by Jan Leßmann and Hermann Hirsch.

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Rekindling the innate understanding that our fates are closely interwoven with everyone and everything on this planet

By **Jessica Westhead**

OUR SENSE OF WONDER is inextricably connected with nature. When we're outside (even if we're only sitting under a tree in a park, with our notifications switched off), our imagination switches on, and it's easier to realize that anything and everything is possible—especially in those magical spaces where there is still more green than grey. *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* brings that outside awe inside.

Moving from one image to another—some whimsical, others unsettling, all of them powerful—in the hushed, gently lit rooms, I felt like I was at once floating and submerging. The gathering of mussels in Praia da Ursa, Sintra, Portugal, depicted by Theo Bosboom (the Netherlands) in *Strength in Numbers* immediately astounded me, even more so when I realized that they were saving each other from being swept away into the ocean. The photo is an urgent reminder that we all have a responsibility to care for each other.

Do you remember the first time you entered a forest, even if you just stayed at the edges because (like me) you might have felt somewhat anxious being totally surrounded by wilderness? *In the Spotlight* by Shreyovi Mehta (India), revealing two Indian peafowl against a backdrop of trees in Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, India, conjures that reverent, fairy-tale feeling. Even more extraordinary? The photographer is only nine years old.

This featured quote by Tony Wu, photo-naturalist and one of the contest judges, really struck me: "Be patient. Meeting an animal is just like meeting a person. It takes time to get to know each other, to bond, to trust ..." And then *Late Night Fishing*, a startling shot by Geoffrey Reynaud (Canada), froze me to the spot as I gazed into the eyes of a grizzly bear hunting for salmon by an icy river in the Yukon and offering a playful smile to the hidden camera trap.

Surprising and heartening moments like these are plentiful at this year's exhibition, which I visited just a few days after the death of a beloved pet. Poptart was a black bear hamster with reddish-black fur and a stripe of white on her belly and the sweetest, brightest spirit, who brought so much joy to me and my family. The grief of losing the animal friends who entrust us with their care can be shattering, and a number of wildlife photographers in this exhibition encourage us to extend that grief to the wildlife that has been destroyed by human-caused climate change and intrusion.

Dewdrop Flamingo by Jan Leßmann and Hermann Hirsch, Germany
HIGHLY COMMENDED, NATURAL ARTISTRY

The people with the longest histories of living in harmony with the land have invaluable knowledge, and Indigenous voices must be centred in environmental stewardship.

Strength in Numbers
by Theo Bosboom,
the Netherlands
HIGHLY COMMENDED,
ANIMALS IN THEIR
ENVIRONMENT

Two images in particular combine artful beauty with horror: In *A Diet of Deadly Plastic*, Justin Gilligan (Australia) has assembled a mosaic from the 403 pieces of colourful plastic found inside the digestive tract of a dead flesh-footed shearwater. Here at home, Patricia Seaton Homonylo has created a harrowing visual showing the 3,900 birds from 103 species that died after flying into windows in the Greater Toronto Area in 2022, with *When Worlds Collide*. When our hearts crack open with the anguish these disturbing images elicit, we have greater access to the fierce love that is necessary to power positive change, to challenge and disrupt the harmful systems that keep taking from nature when what we most need to do now is give back.

Humans are just as vulnerable to the consequences of the climate crisis, though certainly the impacts of environmental injustices are not felt equally. Indigenous, Black, racialized, low-income, unhoused, and other systemically marginalized communities face the worst of these disasters.

For this exhibition, three Indigenous Knowledge Holders from different Nations have recorded stories about relationships in the natural world.

Jason Picard-Binet, who is Wendat from Wendake, speaks about the importance of deer to his Nation: "Even nowadays, hunting for either Aoskway (moose) or Ohskënonton' (deer) on our ancestral lands is an essential part of passing on our culture to Wendat youth ... In addition to harvesting meat, we also teach the kids to respect the entire animal."

Elizabeth Osawamick, who is Anishinaabe from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, speaks about bears and their role in Clans: "The people who are of the Bear Clan, they are the ones that ... knew about the medicines, they knew about different plants that were good for healing ... So the bear is very important to us."

Rosary Spence, who is Mushkego Cree from Fort Albany First Nation, shares teachings from water beings and the importance of protecting the water, inspired by a recent dream: "The beaver was talking to me and sharing with me all of the different medicines that come from deep beneath the earth, under the lakes, and under the streams and rivers, the deep roots that lie within these waterways ... It's communal; it's not individual for these beavers."

The people with the longest histories of living in harmony with the land have invaluable knowledge, and Indigenous voices must be centred in environmental stewardship.

Often, as I immersed myself in the photographers' stunning work, I felt many emotions at once. At first glance, *Dewdrop Flamingo* by Jan Leßmann and Hermann Hirsch (Germany) made me grin when I saw what appeared to be a flamingo showering behind a frosted glass door. Then, I gasped with amazement when I realized that the distant flamingo, in one of Europe's most important wetlands in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, Camargue, France, had been photographed through dewdrops on a spider's web.

These days, with increasing investments in fossil fuels, military technology, and policing over ecological conservation, food security, and affordable housing, and with mega-corporations hiding their environmental devastation behind greenwashing, it can be tempting to become cynical and lose hope. Engaging with our wild relations in these astonishing and galvanizing photographs is an opportunity to rekindle our innate understanding that our fates are closely interwoven with those of everyone and everything on this planet and that we have an obligation to protect our shared future.

Toward the end of my visit, *Old Man of the Glen* by Fortunato Gatto (Italy) completely enchanted me. This bewitching, otherworldly photograph of a gnarled old birch tree covered in pale "old man's beard" lichens in Scotland's Glen Affric ancient pinewoods is like a living Monet painting. I was left feeling profoundly grateful that places like this still exist—and an overwhelming desire to help ensure their preservation.

We all need more wonder in our lives right now. The collected images in this incredibly thoughtful exhibit remind us of that wonder we may have forgotten and reassure us that it's easy to remember, if we only try.

Jessica Westhead is a critically acclaimed author and editor based in Toronto.

Supporting ROM
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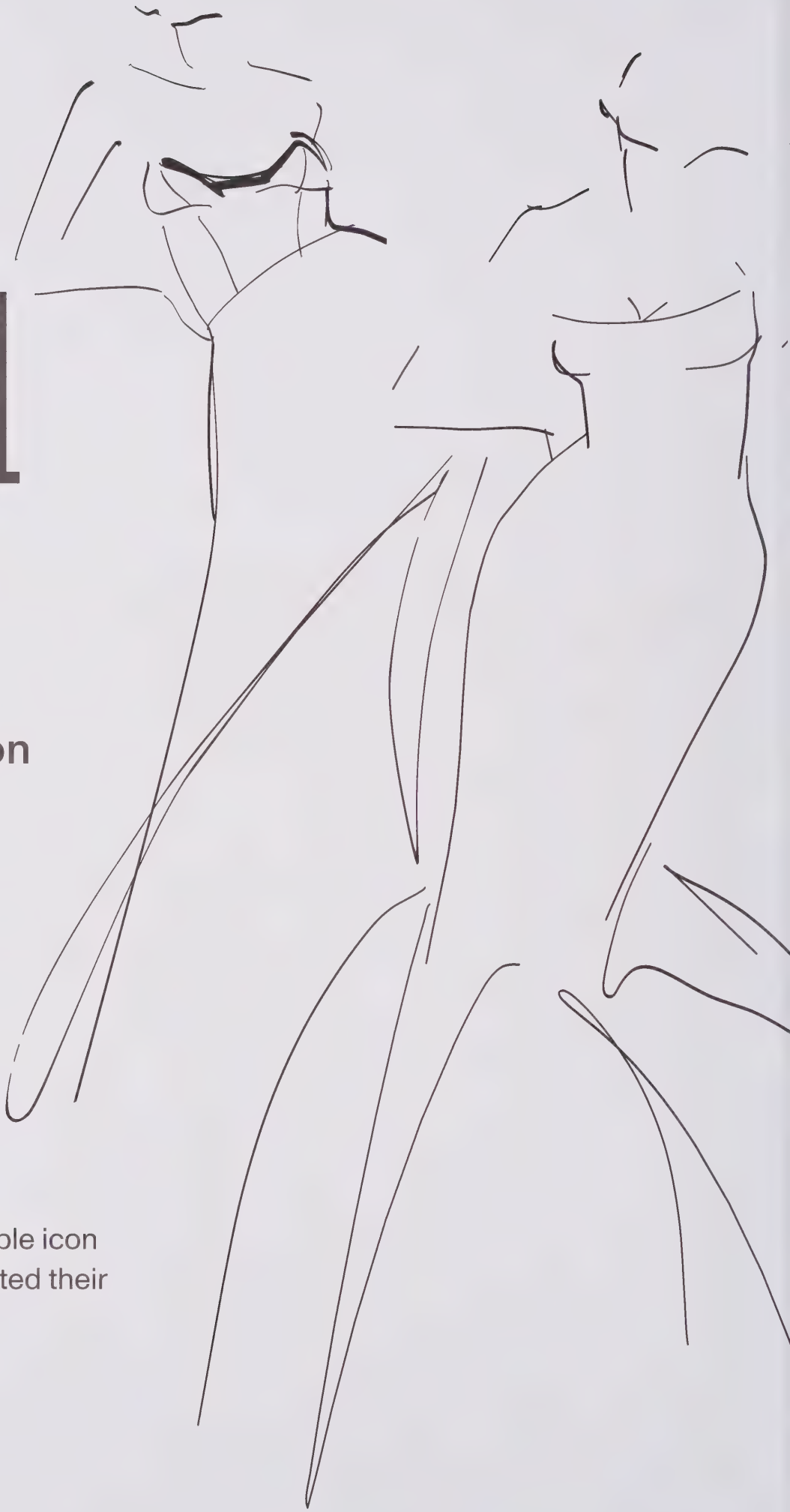
Object Highlight

PART 3

ROM IMMORTAL GALA

The Art of Fashion

Save the Date
November 4, 2025



Honouring an incomparable icon who has selflessly dedicated their life to the art of fashion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

FROM WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY to historical artifacts and contemporary sculpture, this issue of ROM magazine is the perfect expression of the many threads that make up the Museum's fabric. ROM exists at the nexus of art, culture, and nature, opening endless worlds for visitors to explore.

But the objects at the Museum cannot reach their transformative potential without the help of dedicated people bringing them to life—from curators and researchers to makers and artists.

There is also a level of community involvement that one might not immediately see upon a visit to ROM.

For example, a generous gift from Mrs. Hyon Chu Lee, wife of the late sculptor Won Lee, recently enabled ROM to acquire a remarkable collection of his abstract works. This past fall, members of the Korean Canadian community gathered to celebrate the gift and pledge their support for ROM's ongoing efforts to preserve and share Korean heritage. Subsequently, two attendees decided to make a bequest to ROM in their wills to support the Gallery of Korea: Grace Kangmeehae and John Hong-Hee Lee.

ROM's exhibitions also inspire widespread support. The current exhibition *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* drew together a record number of donors and partners—from the Jewish community and beyond—who were compelled by the exhibition's important story and the opportunities to create a better future by understanding our past.

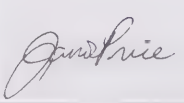
In addition, the recently announced Global Sikh Art and Culture Gallery and Program, currently under development as part of OpenROM, has also garnered a groundswell of community support and motivated many donors to be part of this unique project in its earliest phases.

These examples weave a wonderful story of people coming together through our collections and exhibitions and creating opportunities for cultural exchange and meaningful connections.

It is no secret that another of the Museum's highly celebrated collections is its deep holdings of fashion and textiles, and I'm delighted to share a sneak peek into an upcoming signature event that will focus on our world-class cache of couture. Mark your calendars for the debut of the ROM Immortal Gala on November 4, 2025!

This re-envisioned annual Gala series will draw inspiration from ROM's mandate of art, culture, and nature, with the inaugural event celebrating the art of fashion. To bring the concept to life, we will also launch the ROM Immortal Award, which will showcase and pay tribute to a visionary and iconic individual in the cultural sector. Stay tuned for the announcement of the first-ever recipient of this lifetime achievement award—a true trailblazer whose creativity and tenacity has changed the international fashion landscape forever.

Institutions like ROM are the beating heart of a community, where there is truly something for everyone. We invite you to get involved by supporting our programs and collections. Visit rom.ca/support to learn more.



Janice Price is the President and CEO of ROM Governors.

VISIONARY PHILANTHROPY

Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away. has been made possible in part by Presenting Sponsor the Azrieli Foundation. Through the Foundation's gift, ROM is able to bring this important exhibition to our audiences, encouraging our communities to reflect on the past and come together to build a more understanding and compassionate future.

Thank you to the Azrieli Foundation for its generous support.

Glasses brought into the Auschwitz camp by a deportee (1940s). Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Image used with permission.

Fondation Azrieli Foundation

ROM

Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away. is an exhibition by Musealia, Spain, in collaboration with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, Poland.

LIVES & LEGACIES: FROM CAPITAL GAINS TO CULTURAL GAINS

ENCAPSULATING 8,000 YEARS of history from the Korean peninsula and spanning relics of antiquity to contemporary Korean artworks, ROM's Gallery of Korea is a space for preserving heritage and sharing cultural treasures. For Grace Kangmeehae and John Hong-Hee Lee, it epitomizes the importance of institutions like ROM.

"ROM feels like a sanctuary for me," says Grace. "Outside, the world moves at a relentless pace, but stepping inside, I'm transported to the past, to a quiet escape where I can immerse myself in history and consider our future. But it goes beyond that—it fosters shared responsibility, lifelong learning, and cultural connection too."

Their relationship with the Museum began as many immigrant families' do: through visits with their young children. It deepened when their friend Professor Chai-Shin Yu invited them to experience the Gallery of Korea. Yu had layed a pivotal role in establishing the Gallery by founding the Canadian Association for the Recognition and Appreciation of Korean Art (CARAKA), and his passion for preserving and promoting their shared culture was profoundly inspiring to Grace and John.

"As Korean Canadians, we feel a deep responsibility to ensure that our rich cultural heritage is honoured and shared," says Grace, "and ROM's Gallery of Korea embodies this. We want to help strengthen it for future generations."

To help support and grow the Gallery, Grace and John decided to make a bequest to ROM in their wills. "We realized we could support this vibrant and enduring institution while also helping to preserve and share our own cultural heritage," says Grace.

By making this bequest, Grace and John join the Currelly Legacy Society, a visionary and committed group of donors who are building an exciting future for the Museum. Members receive invitations to special events, opportunities for lifelong learning, and expanded access to galleries, exhibitions, and programming.

With over 20 years of experience as a financial planner and a passion for philanthropy, Grace is a vital ambassador for the group, engaging others on the value of legacy giving and how the Canadian tax system can help society, donors, and beneficiaries.

"I chose a bequest in my will because it allows me to make a purposeful impact by redirecting the capital gains taxes I would otherwise pay," explains Grace. "This way, instead of leaving that decision to the government, I can ensure my contribution directly supports a cause I care deeply about."

"As the saying goes, 'There are two things that are certain: death and taxes,'" continues Grace. "But with a legacy gift, you can plan ahead to turn your vision into something meaningful and evergreen, creating a lasting impact."

To learn more about leaving an indelible and tax-smart legacy, contact Janice Correa at janicec@rom.on.ca.

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A ROM Corporate membership offers a unique opportunity to engage your employees, enhance team culture, and make a positive impact in your community. Visiting the Museum can spark curiosity, creativity, and innovation—energizing your team with fresh ideas and perspectives. Membership also comes with exclusive benefits like free Museum admission and invitations to exhibition previews and behind-the-scenes tours. Impress clients and host unforgettable events in stunning spaces—all while supporting the future of Canada's world museum.

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This carefully curated trip will provide a rich selection of Greece's renowned cultural and architectural heritage—dinners by the sea, old hilltop towns, archaeological ruins, first-class museums, artistic wonders—all backdropped by the country's enduring natural beauty.

To learn more about this trip please contact us at 416-586-8034 or email travel@rom.on.ca.

PAINTED POTTERY

A closer look at vessel decoration from the Egyptian New Kingdom

BLUE-PAINTED POTTERY is the most characteristic and notable type of ceramic from the Egyptian New Kingdom. This is an intact funnel-necked jar with a tall neck and simple rim. The basic colours on this vessel are blue made from cobalt, black made from soot, and red made from ochre applied over a cream slip.

The ovoid body is decorated with two registers of petals, with a blue band outlined in black with a red horizontal line running through the centre where the neck joins the shoulder. Falling from that band is a typical frieze of narrow pendant blue petals with rounded ends added in black.

The origin of this hued treatment lies in the practice of decorating vessels with garlands of flowers on festive occasions. While the elite may have used metalware decorated with real floral garlands, the rest of the populace likely used paint to provide a similar type of decoration.

Funnel-necked jar
Possibly from Amarna, Egypt
c. 1550–1295 BCE
Ceramic (blue-painted earthenware)
34.5 × 20 cm
Gift of Sir Robert Mond

This vessel accords perfectly with the decoration of the North Karnak funnel-necked jars. To explore it in greater detail, visit collections.rom.on.ca.

DON'T JUST READ THIS ADVENTURE, LIVE IT.

The Guild of Immortals welcomes young Members into its ranks. For kids curious about the world, join us as we explore the Museum from top to bottom in search of answers.

rom.ca/guild

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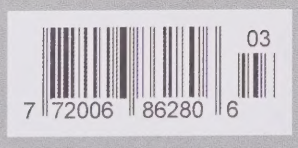

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